

The world

STAT

Senator convinced KGB was in on plot to kill Pope

WASHINGTON (AP)—Sen. Alfonse M. D'Amato (R., N.Y.) said Thursday he was "convinced that the Soviet KGB had full knowledge of and at least tactically supported the plot to kill the Pope."

The senator's statement came at a hearing by the U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe to review recent news reports into alleged Soviet bloc links with the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II in May, 1981.

Earlier this week an NBC broadcast said the Pope had sent a secret note to Soviet President Leonid I. Brezhnev, warning that he would abdicate and return to his native Poland if Soviet troops invaded the country to crush the Solidarity trade union movement.

D'AMATO TOLD the hearing, "I learned of the note during a trip to visit Pope John Paul last year, and discussed the significance of the secret communication with U.S. intelligence officials upon my return to the United States."

"Thus, I believe it is quite apparent that the Soviets would have liked to rid the Vatican of the Polish Pope," he said, adding that "many questions about the international terrorist network which sought to eliminate the Pope remain."

The Soviet news agency, Tass, on Wednesday denied any Soviet involvement in the alleged plot.

JOURNALIST CLAIRE Sterling testified that, based on an intensive investigation into the "hidden forces" behind Mehmet Ali Agca, the Turkish gunman convicted of the attack on the Pope, "it is fair to conclude that the Bulgarian secret service was running this operation."

"Beyond that point, it's up to all of you on the committee, to the public, to the authorities to prove whether and to what degree what was done by the Bulgarian secret service was done with the knowledge and consent of the KGB," she told the congressional panel.

Sterling, author of a Reader's Digest article dealing with the attack on the Pope, said:

"I think that anybody who is expert on the subject would agree that of all the Eastern European states, the Bulgarian communist regime is the most orthodox, pro-Moscow, the most inflexibly loyal to Moscow. And the Bulgarian secret service is the most tightly linked with and at the active service of Moscow."

REP. DON RITTER (R., Pa.) said there is still "great fear" among Western European governments of openly discussing the issue of Soviet bloc involvement with terrorist groups and the alleged plot against the Pope.

"We must ask the question: Who might be the next victim?" Ritter said.